



1 PETER: INTRODUCTORY ISSUES



AUDIENCE,
THEIR SITUATION,
& AUTHOR'S PURPOSES



Audience of 1 Peter: Jewish or Gentile?

■ Primarily Jewish:

- *OT quotations and allusions*
- *Inclusion of OT characters (e.g., Abraham & Sarah; 3:6)*
- *Jewish history assumed and evoked (e.g., exile)*
- *Use of “gentiles” for non-believers at 2:12; 4:3*

Audience of 1 Peter: Jewish or Gentile?

■ Primarily Gentile:

...when you were
ignorant (1:14)

...the empty lifestyle you
inherited from your ancestors (1:18)

You have wasted enough time doing
what unbelievers [Gentiles] desire... (4:3)

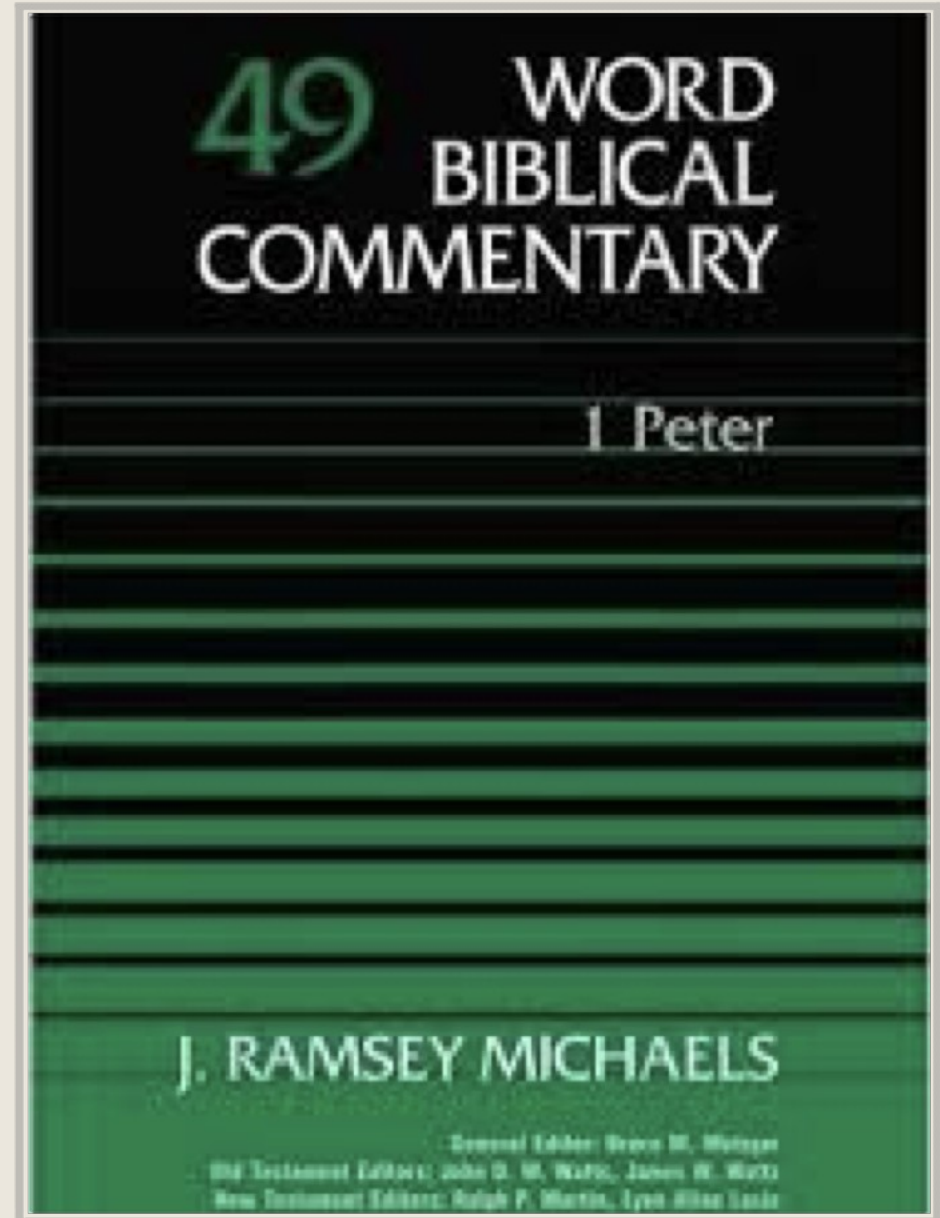
A Primarily Gentile Audience

*The Old Testament story
is their story....*

Majority Position

“1 Peter was written primarily to Gentile Christians in Asia Minor, but...the author, for his own reasons, has chosen to address them as if they were Jews.”

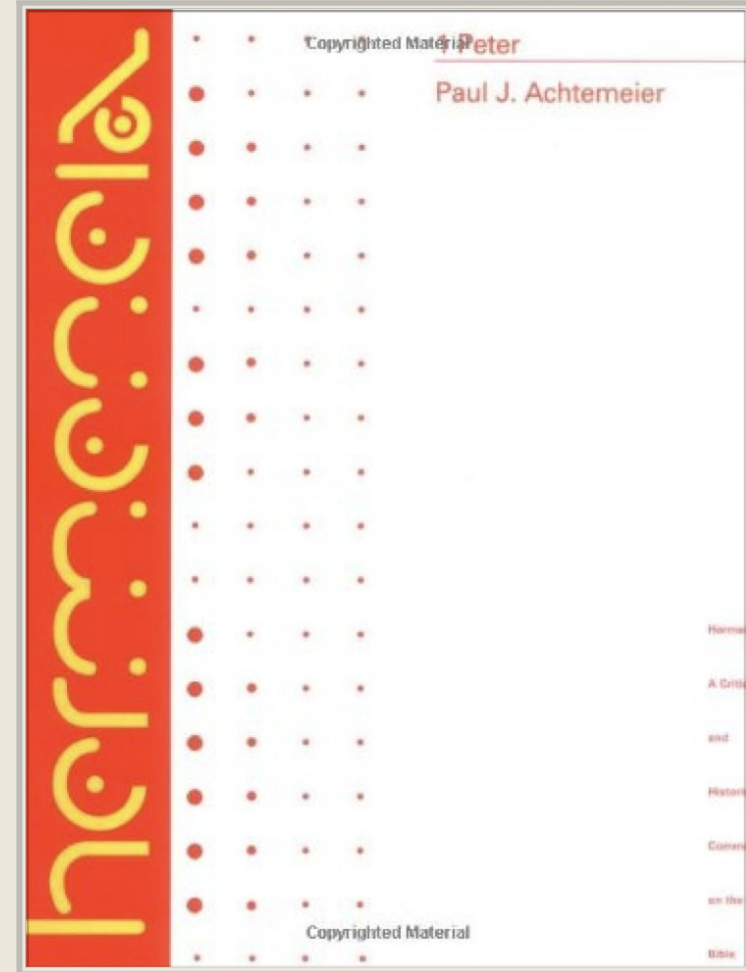
(Michaels, 1 Peter, introduction)



Achtemeier: The Controlling Metaphor of 1 Peter

ISRAEL

“Israelhood”
-Liebengood’s
terminology



Audience of 1 Peter: Believers in five Roman provinces in Asia Minor



Audience: Social Locations?

- ✓ Native peoples
- ✓ Freed persons
- ✓ Slaves
- ✓ Resident aliens/strangers
- ✓ Roman officials/military veterans
- ✓ Numerous Jewish communities

(Elliott, *1 Peter*, 88-89)

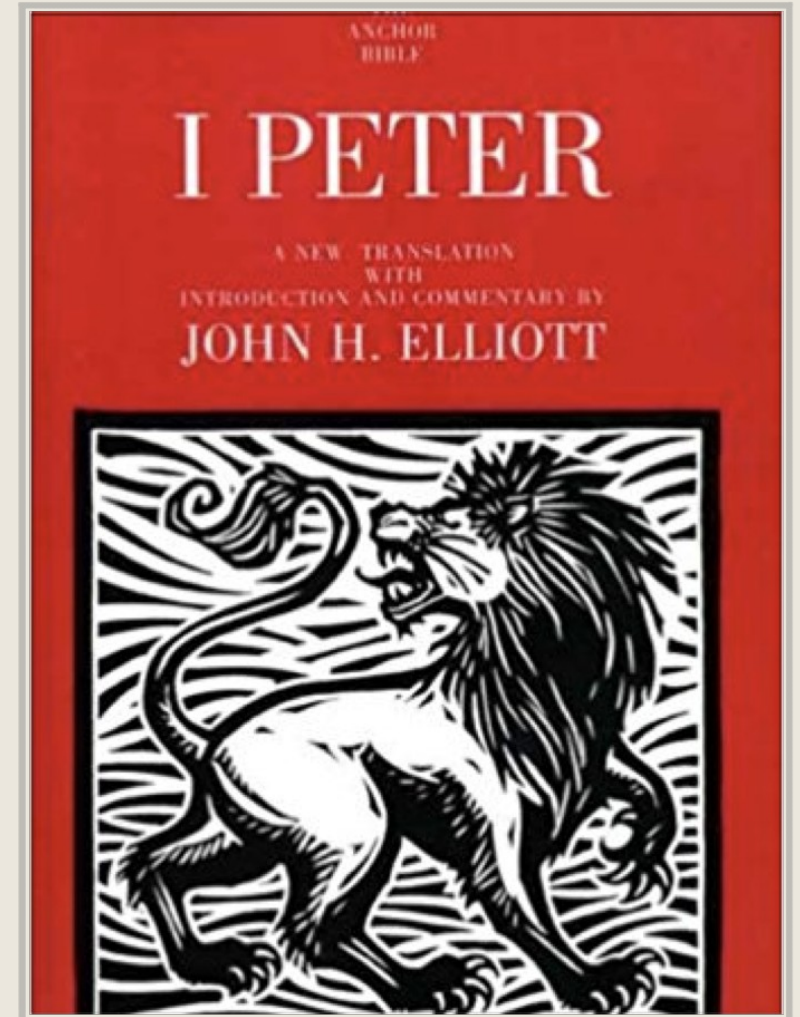
The importance of local (vs. even regional) identities

“Far more often [than regional ethnic expressions], individuals and groups promoted local identities, calling themselves Sardian or Mylasean or Nikomedean. Perhaps it is worth considering such [‘civic’] identities...as the primary identities of the peoples of Anatolia, given the central role of shared kinship myths, attachment to territory, and common history to communal identity in these cities.”

Jeremy LaBuff, *Peoples of Anatolia* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 90.

Audience: “Sojourners” and “Exiles” (2:11)

Reference to
actual “resident
aliens” in Asia
Minor?



Audience: “Sojourners” and “Exiles”

A metaphor for
the audience’s
social
displacement

“...live
circumspectly
during the time
of your
sojourning...”

(1 Pet 1:17; cf. 1:1; 2:11)

Audience: “Strangers” and “Exiles”

Exile is
*temporary and
temporal
(time vs. place)*

- You are being guarded “for the salvation ready to be revealed in the final time” (1:5)
- “...even if now, for a little while, you must be distressed by various kinds of trials” (1:6)
- “...during the time of your sojourning...” (1:17)
- “Now the end of all things is near” (4:7)

Their Situation of Suffering

- “...various kinds of trials” (1:6)
- “even though they accuse you of doing what is wrong” (2:12)
- Goal: “...silence the uninformed words of ignorant people” (2:15)
- Exhorted to “not repay evil with evil or slander with slander” (3:9)
- Goal: keep conscience clear in the face of “...those who disparage your good conduct in the Messiah” (3:16)
- “For you have already spent enough time acting as the gentiles like to act—living in excess, evil cravings, drunkenness, reveling, carousing, and in disgusting idolatry. ⁴ They are astonished that you are no longer joining them in that same flood of reckless abandon, so they malign you” (4:3-4)
- Possible that they might be “reviled because of the name of the Messiah” (4:14) and “suffer as a ‘Christian’” (4:16)
- “...the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by the family of believers across the world” (5:9).

Their Situation of Suffering

- ✓ Local and Informal Hostilities (e.g., verbal slander by unbelievers around them)
 - Susceptible “to charges of wrongdoing and conduct injurious to the well-being of the commonwealth and the favor of the gods” (Elliott, *1 Peter*, 94)
- ✓ Physical violence and emotional harassment for Christians in vulnerable social positions (e.g., slaves and wives, whose masters or husbands are not believers; 2:18; 3:1)
- ✓ Possibility of official or legal actions against Christians (risk of being reported by unbelievers for

Is Christianity “effectively illegal” (Travis Williams and David Horrell)

- Does the situation represented in Governor Pliny’s letter to Emperor Trajan (112 CE), where Christians can be executed, fit the context of the writing of 1 Peter?
- Williams: Emphasizes “the accusatorial nature of the Anatolian legal system”—accusations brought by other residents to the authorities/governor (*Persecution*, 331).

“All judicial cases in Roman Anatolia (both local and provincial) were initiated by members of the local populace, and in many instances, the trials were the result of bitterness and resentment that began on an interpersonal level.”

Travis Williams,
Persecution in 1 Peter

Interpreting 1 Peter 4:14-16

¹⁴ If you are reviled because of the name of the Messiah, you are actually blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

¹⁵ None of you ought to suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as one who rebels against the social order.

¹⁶ But if you should suffer as a “Christian” (“Messiah-adherent”) do not be ashamed, but glorify God in that very name.

PURPOSES OF 1 PETER



Provide Strategies for their Situation of Suffering

- Pursue good and honorable behavior to mitigate and minimize accusations (e.g., 2:12, 15-16; 3:16-17)
- Avoid exacerbating difficult situations (2:20; 3:1)
- Survive!
- Gain strength and comfort from their new family ties (1:22-25; 4:7-11)

“Survival, not reprisal, appears to be the letter writer’s priority.”

Shively Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 74

Cast a Vision of their Identity and Hope

- Their identity as the Messianic community and the people/family of God (2:4-10)
- Their hope in their already-arriving salvation and their coming vindication (1:3, 13, 21; 3:5, 15)

Encourage Loyalty to the Messiah and Faithful Living in Hostile Environments

- “...as the one who called you is holy, you yourselves be holy in all facets of your conduct” (1:15)
- “...live circumspectly during the time of your sojourning” (1:17)
- “Make sure your conduct is honorable among the gentiles ” (2:12)
- “But set apart the Messiah as Lord in your lives, being ready at every turn to give an answer to everyone who asks you for the reason for your common hope. ¹⁶ Yet do so considerately and respectfully...” (3:15-16)

*Singular
allegiance
to Jesus
as Lord*